

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 11 FEBRUARY 2020

Present: Councillors Adkinson, Brindle, M Burton, Joy, Khadka, Mortimer (Chairman), Powell and Purle

Also Present: Councillor McKay

79. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from:

- Councillor D Rose
- Councillor M Rose

80. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that the following Substitute Members were present:

- Councillor Brindle for Councillor D Rose
- Councillor Adkinson for Councillor M Rose

81. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

82. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillor McKay was present as a Visiting Member for Agenda Item 10 – Questions and Answer Session for Members of the Public.

83. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

84. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

85. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That all items be taken in public as proposed.

86. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14 JANUARY 2020

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed.

87. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

88. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Ms Dee Bonnet asked the following question of the Chairman:

"Why does the current Pet Policy In Temporary Housing at Maidstone Borough Council and my request to change the Clause, so that those who are now residing in Temporary Accommodation with their Pets, SHOULD remain there until Permanent Accommodation can be found, have any bearing to the recent Government Guidelines regarding Landlords, Tenants and their Pets and is not on the works programme for this year for the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee? There is nothing stopping Maidstone Borough Council introducing or amending their current policy as it stands, if it wishes, as this was already implemented in July 2018 and inspired by the tragic Suicide of my very best friend John Chadwick. It is indeed the clause as it currently stands, that needs to be changed, as it is placing those at their most vulnerable, at risk of facing sanctions, if a permanent offer is given with a no Pet Policy. The Government is clear there should be a balance with responsible Pet owners, who should not be penalised and a more flexible approach to be taken by Landlords. As it stands the clause I have requested to be changed, is helping those at their most vulnerable, halfway up the ladder, and then they could be forced to choose between "Giving Up Their Pets or Their Home?" I would like to further remind, that my very best friend John Chadwick, was separated from his Pets, his fur babies, to reside in Temporary Accommodation as homeless and died by suicide 10 days later, after being told he had to take the ONE OFFER ONLY of permanent accommodation, otherwise he would have made himself intentionally homeless. I had set the motion in place to fight his case, but this was tragically never to be..."

The Chairman responded to the Question.

Miss Dee Bonett asked the following supplementary question:

"It was previously mentioned that there would be a meeting held with myself to discuss a way forward, is this still something that's going to be considered?"

The Chairman responded to the supplementary question.

To view the full responses from the Chairman of the Committee, please use the below link to access Webcast:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSHgLjOqNjc>

89. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members.

90. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the Committee Work Programme and made the following comments:

- That a date be attributed to the report on Guidance for Fireworks and that this be extended to NSPCC as well as RSPCA as some children are frightened of fireworks; and
- That the Crime and Disorder Committee be held on the same date as the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee on 17th March.

RESOLVED: That the changes to the Committee Work Programme be agreed.

91. CHE Q3 BUDGET & PERFORMANCE MONITORING 19-20

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Business Improvement and the Data Intelligence Officer which set out the 2019/20 financial and performance position for the services reporting to the Committee in Quarter 3 and outlined the following points:

- There was an under spend of £216,000 projected for the year against the annual revenue budget of £8.473 million; and
- There was an anticipated slippage on the capital programme of £4.165 million into 2020/21.

In response to questions from Members, the Officers present advised that:

- The savings on Recycling related to savings from the purchase of wheeled bins;
- The underspend on the Guaranteed Rent Scheme was due to an increase in popularity of the other two schemes in operation. The Guaranteed Rent Scheme was to be closed to concentrate on the alternative schemes;
- The surplus for Homelessness Outreach was caused by the time between provision of the grant and the Council's ability to recruit staff. It was confirmed that the grant money would be carried over; and
- Acceptable levels of litter were calculated using guidance provided by Defra.

RESOLVED: That;

1. The Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 3 for 2019/20, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances have been identified, be noted;
2. The Capital position at the end of Quarter 3 be noted; and
3. The performance position as at Quarter 3 for 2019/20, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant issues have been identified, be noted.

92. ACCESS TO SERVICES REVIEW

The Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer presented the report noting that the report was created in response to a member request, made at the end of the last municipal year.

The Scrutiny Review report recommendations and the record of implementation from 2005/06 had been reviewed. Since 2005/06, the 2010 Equalities Act had been introduced and the Council had ensured that they had robust strategies in place to adhere to this legislation. Upon reviewing the existing key strategic documents and current work-streams, the Officer recommended the creation of a Task and Finish Group to oversee a review of access to services.

RESOLVED: That;

1. The scope at appendix 1 and discussed at paragraph 1.3 (onwards) be agreed; and
2. The Head of Policy, Communications and Governance, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman, be given delegated authority to form a Task and Finish Group and timetable a review, reporting back to the Committee at its next available meeting.

93. HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME REVIEW

The Home Choice and Strategy Team Leader introduced their report, with particular focus given to the following points:

- The report summarised the consultation process which had taken place for 8 weeks from mid-November;
- Kent County Council, the Citizens Advice Bureau and all relevant stakeholders were consulted during this process; and
- Following the report, the 840 households currently on the housing register would be notified of their new banding, in effect from 01 April 2020.

In response to Member's questions, the Team Leader confirmed that Band R – Reasonable Preference, fulfilled the Council's statutory requirements within Section 6 of the Housing Act 1996. The term 'Reasonable' had been chosen to include the multitude of situations which Householders may have faced in being placed on the housing register.

It was confirmed that the Pet Policy provisions were covered by the Temporary Housing Strategy rather than the Housing Allocation Scheme.

RESOLVED: That;

1. The Committee agrees the proposed changes to the Council's Allocation Scheme as stated in paragraphs 3.2 to 3.11 of this report; and

2. In accordance with the paragraph 24.2 of the Allocation Scheme, that the Committee agrees to amend the quota of the percentage of properties allocated to each band to those stated in paragraph 3.8 of this report.

94. WATER RE-FILL SCHEME

The Water Refill Scheme report was introduced to the committee following a Member request for further information at the previous meeting on 14 January 2020.

The Head of Environment and Public Realm highlighted the following points:

- The request was for £15k for three units, subject to the required exploratory and procurement exercises, as part of the Waste Strategy 2018-2023 as agreed by the Committee;
- Each unit would cost approximately £3k, with an annual maintenance cost of approx. £120 on a three- or five-year agreement;
- Free installation of the units may occur, dependent on continued correspondence with South East Water;
- An estimated £4k would be used for marketing the scheme;
- Purchase of the re-fill units was relevant given the increased awareness of environmental concerns within society and the movement against single use plastics; and
- Installation of the units would coincide with the 18 businesses in Maidstone that have already signed up to refill plastic bottles upon request.

It was confirmed that the units have an expected lifespan of eight years, after which they can be refurbished and that maintenance packages were only available for three to five years at a time. The funding for this would come from the spare capacity within the recycling budget.

The Committee expressed interest in how the success of the scheme would be measured, with Officers stating that water meters would be installed at each unit and that businesses would be contacted to consult on how often they were asked to refill bottles. It was requested that the Committee be updated on the progress of the scheme.

RESOLVED: That;

1. The Committee agrees the investment of £15k allocated from the Capital Programme for the installation of three water refill stations, two in the Town Centre and one at Mote Park; and

2. The Committee agrees that the Council should sign up to and promote the existing Refill Scheme to offer free tap water to visitors.

95. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 7.43 p.m.